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SUBJECT: LACK OF OSCE LEADERSHIP UNDERCUTS DEMOCRATIC
REFORM EFFORTS IN AZERBAIJAN

REF: TRAUB/POLASCHIK EMAIL OF 9/20/06

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse, per 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) With Presidential elections looming in 2008, we cannot afford to continue with weak OSCE leadership in Azerbaijan. The OSCE can and should provide coordination and leadership to the international community's efforts to promote democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments are a key tool to guide reform. As such, the OSCE is uniquely placed to speak for the broad range of European countries that have signed on to the OSCE's principles, and to lead our efforts to hold the Government of Azerbaijan accountable to its OSCE commitments. While the GOAJ took some positive steps in the run-up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections, we have seen backsliding in recent months in the key areas of media freedom and freedom of assembly. The international community needs to make a concerted, unified effort now to press for full implementation of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations from the November 2005 parliamentary elections, and to coordinate and maximize its efforts to engage the GOAJ and stem the current deterioration in media freedom and freedom of assembly. The absence of an effective OSCE presence during a critical period in Azerbaijan's democratic development -- the two years preceding the 2008 Presidential elections -- will impede our efforts to maintain momentum on key reforms.

¶2. (C) The effectiveness of the OSCE's efforts in Azerbaijan has been hampered by the weak leadership of current Head of Mission Ambassador Mauricio Pavesi. Pavesi's political views, chronic mismanagement of the OSCE office, and frequent failure to coordinate with and disregard for the views of OSCE member states have seriously undercut the OSCE's ability to provide much-needed leadership here on democracy, human rights and political reform in Azerbaijan (ref). In the last few months, for example, we learned from OSCE contacts that Pavesi quashed OSCE members states' strategy for addressing mounting problems on freedom of assembly and media freedoms. On the freedom of assembly issue, Pavesi ignored member states' concerns and those of his staff, and organized a closed-door roundtable discussion in which working-level OSCE staff lectured senior GOAJ officials. OSCE members states have never received a readout from Pavesi on that meeting.

¶3. (C) On media freedoms -- an area in which member states have expressed increasing concern over a deteriorating environment -- Pavesi simply ignored member states' repeated requests for the OSCE to organize a joint demarche. Pavesi

finally moved ahead on member states' long-standing request to bring OSCE Representative on Media Freedoms Miklos Harazsti to Baku but disregarded OSCE member state embassies' request to brief Harazsti before his official meetings with President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov. These are only the latest examples in which Pavesi's management has hindered the international community's ability to effectively engage the GOAJ on key democracy and human rights issues, areas in which the OSCE Mission should be a leading advocate on behalf of the international community. The UK Mission in Baku has weighed in strongly with the same view.

¶4. (C) Our understanding is that Pavesi will leave Baku in December and a search is underway for his successor. We further understand that an Italian and a Russian national currently are being considered to fill the Baku Head of Mission job. Given Russia's bitter legacy in Azerbaijan, history in the region, and Russia's own poor record on human rights and democracy, we are concerned that having a Russian national in this high profile position could undercut the OSCE's credibility at a time when it will be essential for progress on democratization. In the run-up to Azerbaijan's November 2005 parliamentary elections, for example, Russia tried to stack the OSCE short-term observer mission with 700 CIS observers. Memories of Russian attempts to influence the OSCE process are fresh and we are concerned that a Russian national -- no matter how effective -- inherently will be viewed as a less than honest broker. We urge that the USG work to ensure the OSCE selects a highly competent, non-Russian official for this critical job in Baku.

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